

Claims

1. A method by which third parties facilitate the conduct of business between buyers and sellers of products, comprising:

negotiating arrangements between a facilitating entity and at least one supplier, for said supplier to provide products to customers of a business partner at negotiated prices, said business partner also individually providing goods or services to said customers other than the products provided by said supplier.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein said arrangements stipulate that only parties that are customers of the business partner are provided access to the prices negotiated by the facilitating entity.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein the service of negotiating said arrangements is performed by the facilitating entity.

4. The method of claim 3 wherein said service of negotiating said arrangements is provided to said customers free of direct charge.

5. The method of claim 3 further comprising transferring fees from said customers to said facilitating entity for said service of negotiating said arrangements.

6. The method of claim 1 further comprising providing an information processing system for facilitating the purchase of products by customers from said suppliers via a common electronic access point.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein said arrangements include payment of commissions to the facilitating entity and/or business partner for products sold to said customers.

8. The method of claim 7 wherein at least a part of commission revenue resulting from a supplier sale to a customer is paid to the business partner responsible for the inclusion of said customer in said arrangements.

9. The method of claim 7 wherein commissions are divided among the facilitating entity and business.

10. The method of claim 9 wherein there is a plurality of business partners, and commissions are divided among the business partners on a pro-

rata basis based upon sales to customers or the number of customers of each business partner included in said arrangements.

11. The method of claim 1 wherein the products provided by said supplier are indirect goods and services that are not used in the production of goods and services by the customers.

12. The method of claim 1 wherein the products provided by said suppliers are direct goods and services that are used by customers in the production of goods and services.

13. The method of claim 1 wherein there is a plurality of business partners said suppliers are suppliers to a horizontal market that may include customers of a plurality of said business partners.

14. The method of claim 1 wherein there is a plurality of business partners and said suppliers are suppliers to a vertical market that primarily includes only customers of one of the business partners.

15. The method of claim 1 further comprising

negotiating arrangements with an employee services provider to provide employee services or benefits to employees of said customers.

16. The method of claim 15 wherein said employee services provider provides access to employee health insurance.

17. The method of claim 15 wherein said employee services provider provides access to discounted entertainment or travel.

18. The method of claim 1 wherein said arrangements provides discounted pricing of said supplier to all customers of said business without restriction.

19. The method of claim 1 wherein said arrangements establish criteria upon customers for discount eligibility.

20. The method of claim 19 wherein said criteria include meeting credit requirements.

21. The method of claim 19 wherein said criteria are established uniformly for all customers.

22. The method of claim 19 wherein said criteria are established by said business partner and are applicable only to customers of that business partner.

23. The method of claim 1 further comprising including one or more additional business partners in said arrangements, such that said supplier provides discounted pricing to customers of said additional business partners.

24. The method of claim 23 further comprising including one or more additional suppliers in said arrangements, such that discounted pricing from said additional suppliers is available to said customers.

25. The method of claim 24 wherein one of said suppliers is converted to a business partner, such that customers of said supplier are able to access discounted pricing that has been negotiated with other suppliers.

26. The method of claim 1 wherein said facilitating entity is independent of said business partners.

27. A system for conducting business between buyers and sellers of products, administered by a facilitating entity, comprising:

entering an order for a product electronically, whereby said order is entered by a user of a customer of a business partner for a product of a supplier at an established price;

whereby a facilitating entity:

- (1) selects the business partners and suppliers who participate in the system;
- (2) provides a means by which a user can access information about products of suppliers;
- (3) negotiates established prices for products with the suppliers; and
- (4) stores and processes information that can be used to facilitate the business among the participants of the system.

28. The system of claim 27 wherein said facilitating entity is independent of said business partners.

29. The system of claim 27 wherein said facilitating entity enrolls customers and users for participation in the system.

30. A system for conducting business between buyers and sellers of products, administered by a facilitating entity, comprising:

entering an order for a product electronically, whereby said order is entered by a user of a customer of a business partner for a product of a supplier at an established price;

whereby a facilitating entity:

- (1) selects the business partners and suppliers who participate in the system;
- (2) provides a means by which an individual employed by a participant in the system, can access employee benefits or discounts;
- (3) negotiates established prices for employee benefits or discounts with the suppliers; and
- (4) stores and processes information that can be used to facilitate the business among the participants of the system.

31. A system for conducting business between buyers and sellers of products, administered by a facilitating entity, comprising:

entering an order for a product electronically, whereby said order is entered by a user of a customer of a facilitating entity for a product of a supplier at an established price;

whereby said facilitating entity:

- (1) selects the customers who participate in the system;
- (2) provides a means by which a user can access information about products of suppliers;
- (3) negotiates established prices for products with the suppliers; and
- (4) stores and processes information that can be used to facilitate the business among the participants of the system.

32. A method by which a third party facilitates the conduct of business between buyers and sellers of products, comprising:

negotiating arrangements between customers of a business partner and at least one supplier, for said supplier to provide products to customers of said business partner at negotiated prices, said business partner also individually providing goods or services to said customers other than the products provided by said supplier.

33. The method of claim 32 wherein said arrangements stipulate that only parties that are customers of the business partner are provided access to the prices negotiated by the facilitating entity.

34. The method of claim 32 wherein the service of negotiating said arrangements is performed by a facilitating entity affiliated with said business partner.

35. The method of claim 34 wherein said service of negotiating said arrangements is provided to said customers free of direct charge.

36. The method of claim 34 further comprising transferring fees from said customers to said facilitating entity for said service of negotiating said arrangements.

37. The method of claim 32 further comprising providing an information processing system for facilitating the purchase of products by customers from said suppliers via a common electronic access point.

38. The method of claim 32 wherein said arrangements include payment of commissions to the business partner for products sold to said customers.

39. The method of claim 32 wherein the products provided by said supplier are indirect goods and services that are not used in the production of goods and services by the customers.

40. The method of claim 32 wherein the products provided by said suppliers are direct goods and services that are used by customers in the production of goods and services.

41. The method of claim 32 wherein said arrangements provides discounted pricing of said supplier to all customers of said business without restriction.

42. The method of claim 32 wherein said arrangements establish criteria upon customers for discount eligibility.

43. The method of claim 42 wherein said criteria include meeting credit requirements.

44. The method of claim 42 wherein said criteria are established uniformly for all customers.

45. The method of claim 32 further comprising
including one or more additional suppliers in said arrangements, such
that discounted pricing from said additional suppliers is available to said
customers.

46. A system for conducting business between buyers and sellers of
products, administered by a facilitating entity, comprising:

entering an order for a product electronically, whereby said order is
entered by a user of a customer of a business partner for a product of a supplier
at an established price;

whereby a facilitating entity:

- (1) is affiliated with said business partner;
- (2) selects suppliers who participate in the system;
- (3) provides a means by which a user can access information about
products of suppliers;
- (4) negotiates established prices for products with the suppliers; and
- (5) stores and processes information that can be used to facilitate the
business among the participants of the system.

47. The system of claim 46 wherein said facilitating entity enrolls
customers and users for participation in the system.

48. A system for conducting business between buyers and sellers of products, administered by a facilitating entity, comprising:

entering an order for a product electronically, whereby said order is entered by a user of a customer of a business partner for a product of a supplier at an established price;

whereby a facilitating entity:

- (1) is affiliated with said business partner;
- (2) selects suppliers who participate in the system;
- (3) provides a means by which an individual employed by a participant in the system, can access employee benefits or discounts;
- (4) negotiates established prices for employee benefits or discounts with the suppliers; and
- (5) stores and processes information that can be used to facilitate the business among the participants of the system.